

VERNON W. PRIGMORE:
JUST AN AUXILIARIST
COMMANDER, VICE-COMMANDER, TRAINING OFFICER

Interviewee: Vernon W. Prigmore

Interviewed: 1977

Published: 1977

Interviewer: Evelyn Beeson

UNOHP Catalog #072

Description

Vernon W. Prigmore was born in 1907. He came to Nevada in the middle 1930s and stayed by accident when his car broke down in Ely and the parts couldn't be replaced. Being a jack-of-all-trades, he was able to find work as a butcher in Ely during the Depression years. Gambling was just coming into Nevada at that time, and he went into the new business, eventually ending up as a keno writer. He retired in 1972 after working thirty-two years at Harolds Club.

Mr. Prigmore spent sixteen years in the military. He served on the U.S.S. Arizona for three years during peacetime, and following the Pearl Harbor attack, he was back on the recruiting house steps the next morning. He was retreaded, as he calls it, when the Korean War broke out.

In his oral history, Mr. Prigmore describes the formation of the Coast Guard Auxiliary patrols as a public safety and rescue group. His boating knowledge and "bulldogging" in early years contributed much to the established membership of the Coast Guard Auxiliary. Prigmore recounts his activities and offices he held in the organization. In later years he was awarded a life membership in recognition of long years of service and was commended several times for his work as a Training Officer.

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EVELYN BEESON PRODUCED THIS ORAL HISTORY AS A STUDENT IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO, 1977 SUMMER SESSION COURSE,
“ORAL HISTORY: METHOD AND TECHNIQUE.” EVELYN BEESON IS A MEMBER OF
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An Oral History Conducted by Evelyn Beeson

University of Nevada Oral History Program

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<http://www.unr.edu/oralhistory>

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Printed in the United States of America

Publication Staff:
Director: Mary Ellen Glass

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PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber
Director, UNOHP
July 2012

INTRODUCTION

Vernon W. Prigmore came to Nevada around the middle '30s and stayed by accident when his car broke down and the parts couldn't be replaced. Being a jack-of—all-trades, he was able to find work as a butcher during the depression years when he had been stranded near Ely, Nevada.

Gambling was just coming into Nevada about that time, and he went into the new business, ending up as a keno writer with 32 years' service at Harolds Club. He retired in '72 after 32 years of service.

Being in the service for over 16 years, Mr. Prigmore had a very deep sense of service to our country. He served on the Arizona, and after the Pearl Harbor attack he was on the recruiting steps the next morning. He was "retreaded", as he calls it, when the Korean War broke out also.

The empty boat trailers were being counted toward evenings and concern for the missing boaters promoted formation of the Coast Guard Auxiliary patrols as a public safety and rescue group.

Mr. Prigmore's boating and water knowledge and his "bulldogging" through those early years has contributed much to the established membership of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

He was always an active participant in the organization, holding offices, and in later years being awarded a life membership in recognition of long years of service. He was commended several times for his work as Training Officer.

Now in retirement after very serious surgery, he is as active as he can be, attending to his extra projects and enjoying the activities of his family—his son Ricky and his grandchildren.

When asked to participate in the oral history project, Mr. Prigmore accepted readily. Commander Earl Howell had made a request for the early history of Flotilla 73, also. There were three taping sessions at Mr. Prigmore's home. He spoke enthusiastically from memory, reinforced with clippings of the past events and with a special tribute to

James Buchanan, the backbone of the early founders.

His review of the resulting script brought no deletions.

The Oral History Project of the University of Nevada Library preserves the past and present for future research by tape recording the reminiscences of the person's activity in our local community's growth. Scripts resulting from the interviews are deposited in the Special Collections Department of the University of Nevada libraries. Vernon W. Prigmore's oral history memoir is designated as open for research.

Evelyn Beeson
University of Nevada, Reno
July, 1977

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Evelyn Beeson: Where did you say you were born?

Vernon W. Pregmore: I was born in Ellensburg, Washington, November 20, 1907. We moved down to Prosser and Richland in 1916. I attended school in Kennawick or at Richland. Then my dad died when I was nine years old, and we moved to Bellingham where I attended grade school and completed the eighth grade.

I went in the navy in 1925 when I was seventeen and got out in 1928, as a minority cruise. I had worked for sawmills in Bellingham, so when I got out of the navy the first time I went back up to Bellingham. The only thing I knew was painting, so I got a painting contract.

I met a Mrs. Stengly. Her husband owned the Peter Rabbit Markets in Bellingham. He talked me into going in as an apprentice butcher, so I worked three years for him.

In '32, when Grand Coulee dam was being built, I moved over to Grand Coulee

and worked on the dam for about two years, driving cat on the graveyard shift. Then when the low dam was completed by the Big Six Company, I started down to Arizona to work on the aqueduct. I had an old twenty-nine Erskine, and it conked out just north of Wells—it threw a rod—and I couldn't get parts for it so I drove into Ely.

I noticed a butcher shop was just opening in the Safeway market, so I went over and asked if they needed butchers. He said they didn't need any in the Safeway store but that the Ely Meat & Grocery needed a butcher, so I went to work for the Ely Meat and Grocery. I worked about a year and a half.

I got tangled up in the gambling business about 1938. I guess it was about the latter part of '37 that I lost what money I had made at Grand Coulee, and I decided that since I had lost my money at the Bank Club that I was going to go to the Bank Club and get my money back. So I went in there, and I acted as a cocktail waiter for about four or five months. Bud Simpson, the owner of the place, or one

of the owners, Bill Goodman and he said they were going to make me a keno writer, so I worked as a keno writer and ended up in '72 in Harolds Club as a keno writer (laughs), but that's the early part of my life.

LATE DEPRESSION AND WAR YEARS

I met my wife, Elzada, in '39, and we were married in 1940, and we moved over to Reno, and I went to work for Harolds Club on December 21st, 1940.

Then war broke out. I had been on the Arizona in peacetime and in my first hitch—almost three years—so when it was sunk at Pearl Harbor, I was on the recruiting house steps the next morning to enlist. We had two foster children in our home, and they wouldn't let me enlist for that reason, so I didn't get into the navy until I went into the Sea-Bees as a second class ship's cook and butcher in 1942, and I got out in 1945.

I wanted to stay in Oakland, but the laws down in Oakland, or the by-laws of the union, wouldn't let me in—closed shop— until all of their men had been taken up, so I went back to writing keno in Harold's Club, and I wrote keno until I retired in '72.

Then when the Korean war broke out, I was retreaded into the navy again, and I spent some time on the East Coast—Camp Endicott—and went on the U.S.S. Belgrove on the East Coast, which is a landing ship dock.

FORMATION OF COAST GUARD AUXILIARY

Why did the Coast Guard sponsor the Auxiliary? What was their jurisdiction out at Pyramid Lake and Lake Tahoe?

Well, it's federal waters or international waters. Lake Tahoe borders on two states, constituting international waters. Topaz Lake borders on both California and Nevada, and that would be considered international waters, and that would come under the jurisdiction of the Coast Guard. Pyramid Lake is on the Indian Reservation¹, which is federal land; that comes under the jurisdiction of the Coast Guard, so we have quite a number of lakes that are under Coast Guard jurisdiction. The lake this side of Hawthorne—Walker Lake—part of it is on the Indian Reservation, so it would come under the jurisdiction of the Coast Guard, but I don't think there's a Coast Guard Auxiliary down at Walker Lake. They have tried to get us to go out to Lahontan, and we have done patrol out there, and we have done patrol on Topaz, and we've done patrol on Walker Lake. The jurisdiction of

the Coast Guard comes under the heading of international waters, and anything that's called international waters or federal waters, then, comes under its jurisdiction. That's what originally started it up here.

We formed the Coast Guard—Jim Buchanan lived in Sparks and I got acquainted with him—and it was Jim Buchanan, Alan Bible and Lou Spitz and Harry O'Brien and Wells Watkins. Harry O'Brien is dead now; he got killed in an accident; Watkins is dead; I don't know what caused his death. We formed the Auxiliary in the latter part of '59. Jim Buchanan had been in the Coast Guard, I think, down on the coast, and when he moved up here to Reno, he decided he was going to get some sportsmen together and form a Coast Guard Auxiliary unit here in Reno. I first heard of it through Chet and Link Piazzo at the Sportsman.

I went to the first meeting. We had kind of a get-together meeting up at the Naval

1. Indians' governing body.

Reserve Center at the University of Nevada on Evans. The following week we held our initial opening meeting. For several weeks we held our meetings at the University of Nevada or at the Naval Reserve Center up there, but it came in conflict with their drills. Then the Mapes Hotel gave us a room large enough that we could hold our meeting; we only had about nine or ten members at the time of our getting together. We held some meetings down there; we held some meetings at private homes of different members, and it came about for that reason.

EVOLUTION OF BOATING SAFETY PROGRAM

We realized that the boaters here had no training and nobody to protect them or to give them an idea of what to do. So we decided that the Coast Guard Auxiliary are boat teachers or safety teachers along with the Outboard Boating Association, and there are several that do this same kind of thing. It is a necessity. Every family who owns a boat should go to the Auxiliary or the Power Squadron or the Outboard Motor Boat Companies, whoever is giving instructions in their area. They should take these instructions because they are necessary.

I picked up my boat at the Regatta out at Pyramid Lake. One of them that was used as a patrol boat had a hole in the bow, and that's what I used all the time I was on active duty with the Coast Guard Auxiliary. Pete Barengo was the Patrol Commander for the Regatta, and I was his assistant. I worked around the ramps, pulling the boats back in and getting them up to the docks so that they could be serviced for their next round or whatever they needed.

We went up to Lake Tahoe two years following that in '61; I guess it was about in

'61 when Al Graves and Wanda Graves came into the organization.

It was about three years that there was Wells Watkins, Harry O'Brien and myself. We traded back and forth—one year Wells would be the Commander, and Harry O'Brien would be the Vice-Commander, and I'd be Training Officer. The reason they left me as Training Officer most of the time was because I was the only one that was qualified for knots and seamanship because I had been in that business. So then I was Patrol Commander up there two years. We had five years up at Lake Tahoe, which was beautiful under Bill Harrah's sponsorship.

We had quite a struggle; we'd hold Auxiliary meetings different places. Finally Pete Barengo said, "Well, I've got that Crow's Nest, and if you kids want to you can clean it up and make it your meeting place," he says, "You can have it rent free as long as you want it." (Top floor of Sierra Wine and Liquor). So that's where we hold our meetings.

Alan Bible wanted very much to belong to our group, and he did a lot in Washington.

He gave us our first two flags that we had that had flown over the capitol, and those are the ones that we used up at our meeting places.

The motive for becoming involved in the Auxiliary was that when we went out to these boating places we would see these people buy a boat, and the dealer would hand them a key and show them how to put gas in it and how to start the motor, and they would say the lake is out there (gesture), and we thought that wasn't the way to do it. We fought for quite a number of years trying to get the boat dealers to explain to them what they would need in the way of equipment on their boat, and I've always been conscious of boat safety. Even when I was in the navy, I was coxswain of the motor sailor, I was coxswain of the Captain's barge, and the Admiral's barge when the Admiral was aboard the Arizona, so I had quite a bit of experience.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE INDIANS

My relationship with the Indians was very good. I got along awfully well with the boys out at Pyramid Lake and went to Nixon to two or three of the meetings to get permission to put our buoys in, and we put buoys in three different years. Finally, the Coast Guard said that we couldn't do that. Our orders were from 12th District that we shouldn't do that any more, so we had to abandon that project. (The buoys were put out to protect the swimming area and near large rocks just under the water that you might not be able to see.)

How did the Indians operate the lake on their fee basis?

Well, when we first started, they never charged the Coast Guard Auxiliary anything at all, but it was originally, I think, a dollar a day going in or it was five dollars a year. If you bought a ticket for five dollars, that was good for a year. If you didn't, then you paid a dollar a day to go in. That was the rate for quite awhile. I don't know what the price is now. I think it is quite a bit higher. I think it is about

fifteen dollars for the year dues, and I think it is about a dollar and a half to two dollars daily. But the Indians still do the collecting; we work with the Indians in that respect. Our patrols and everything that we hold out at Pyramid Lake is under the sanction of the Coast Guard and of the Indian Tribal Council. They have Avery as one of the ones. There are several of the boys that are just like a deputy sheriff out there for their Tribal Council, and they're the ones that handle the fees.

Who were some of the Indians out there, Winnemucca?

Well, Chief Winnemucca, I met him several years ago when I first went out there to Pyramid, and then there's Avery—he's the deputy. Then Al Graves, while he was in the Coast Guard Auxiliary, he was the deputy sheriff out there for the sheriff's department for about three years. I don't know who the Deputy Sheriff is out there because I haven't—since I retired, I just don't have the money to go back and forth. It takes practically a tank

of gas to drive out and back if you go out to Pyramid. That's why I haven't been going out.

Boating should be a very good thing for the Indians.

Well, it is, but they—I don't know—in my opinion they want everything, and they don't want to do anything themselves. They want other people to do it for them, and I think it should be a cooperating deal. If we do so much, they should be willing to at least help themselves, but for a long time they didn't, I know. Whether they're any better now or not I don't know. For awhile there, you couldn't get cooperation. I think we had to go to four different Council meetings just to get permission to put the buoys in. You'd go out there and sit out on the porch in the hot sun, and they'd be sitting around there in the meeting hall. They'd call one of us in—three of us went out—Al Graves, myself and another time it was Wells Watkins and I went out, and then I forget who the other one was that went another time. They finally gave us permission to put the buoys in and then after we got them in and got them situated the Navy—or the Coast Guard itself—stepped in and said that we couldn't do it—that we weren't buoy tenders. So we had to turn it over to the Indians to do it, and they just gradually disappeared. I don't think there are any out there except for what the Fish and Game put in to protect their traps that they have out there, for their count and one thing and another. I think they don't turn them loose until they get to a certain size, but they get climatized to the water and to the salinity of the water which is quite different than it is in any other body of water around here.

What would happen when they would call you into the meeting?

Well, you just stand there, and you tell them what you wanted, and somebody would say "How" and someone else would say "Well." Then they say all right, you go on out. Pretty soon they'd call you back in and tell you whether they'd grant it or not. When they were talking amongst themselves, you were outside. That was an Indian deal and the white man wasn't in on it. They couldn't hear the pow-wows they were holding inside at all.

It was rather interesting. I rather enjoyed going out because it was a good deal different than what I expected. I expected that we'd go in there and tell them what we wanted to do and how it would help them and how it would help the boaters and then they'd vote on it—whether they wanted it or didn't want it. But no, they kicked us out, and they pow-wowed amongst themselves, and then they'd call us back in and tell us whether we could or couldn't (laughs). It was kind of an experience, and, of course, that's the way they run their business. They're kind of different than we are, but they were like that a hundred years ago.

Now who was in charge of the Tribal Council?

Well yes, the secretary was—one of the squaws was the secretary—I don't know what her name was, but she ran the meetings and all the rest of them sat around and they'd say just one word—yes or no—that was it. I think they called her Queenie. I don't know what her real name was, but she seemed to be the recording secretary, the business agent and everything of the kind. She ran the meeting. There was nobody else; she'd sit there at the head of the table, but she was right next to him. She'd lean over and tell him something, and he'd repeat it; but she was the one that was running the meetings. In other words, I think it's a woman that runs the Council out

there. That's my opinion; of course, that could be different from what they think.

Did the Indians rely on this boating income for their support?

That and what the federal government furnishes them and what they make on road work. The county, I understand, paid them to do because any road work done on the Indian Reservation has to be done by Indian labor. In other words, the Indians build the roads and maintain the road, and whether the county pays them, or the state pays them, or the federal government pays them, I don't know who pays them. I never was in contact with anything, so I don't know. I don't think that they can make much of a living—not the way they're running the boating facility out there. Their ramps—we helped build three of the ramps, and the Fish and Game keep maintaining the ramps and so I don't know whether it's much of a living, from what they were making off of the boats. There's an awful lot of boats that go out there, though. I don't think there's very much of a living for them at Nixon if they did. So I think it's the federal government sponsors all the Indians on the Reservation; I think it's mostly that.

Are they still making baskets, etc.?

I don't know if they are or not. I don't think these Indians around here are; some of the Indians down around Pueblo and Arizona do. But even though they do, Indians don't manage. White people have concessions, and they sell them. I don't know—the Indians are not very aggressive when it comes to business.

I took the buoys home to be painted, and they were drop tanks for the gasoline for the B52 bombers, or the big bombers. They stood about five and a half foot high, and I imagine

they would hold about sixty or seventy gallons. I don't know what they would. But that's what they were. They called them drop tanks, and we got them from down by Walker Indian Reservation—down there at that Navy powder thing and installation, and we brought home, I think, about twenty-five of them. I took fifteen of them home and sanded and painted them—painted them white, and then we put the markers on them—five or ten miles an hour on them—white and red. (I think I have pictures of some of the buoys in my back yard).

Did the Indians have their Pow-wow dances very often out at Pyramid?

They used to. I don't think they've had any, but nearly every year they would have their Pow-wow dances and get into costume, usually it was around rodeo time, and then when we had the Regatta's out there—then we had each year—they held their Pow-wow and their War Dances. They were very colorful, the Indian costumes are beautiful, and the dancing is authentic, so it has been carried down from generation to generation. But I don't think they've had one for quite awhile now; they hold them out at the rodeo's though—State Fair and the rodeo.

At Pyramid, over the fourth, they would have their big friendship circle dance where people could come out and join then.

Well, of course, when they were holding those, I was usually out sitting on the lake in the boat on patrol (laughs). So I never did get to see one of those. I saw them out at the rodeo and the fair.

PYRAMID LAKE MAP

I was the instigator of getting the map made up of Pyramid Lake, and as I was working at Harolds Club, I had one of the boys down there take an old map that had been in the paper, and we made this map up between the two of us. We printed about five hundred of them courtesy of Harolds Club, and they were put out, and that one they can have (clippings to go in the Special Collections file—map). I don't know which year this was (safety program held out at Pyramid Lake). Aim: safe boating— your checklist for boating safety—1961—picture receiving charter.

RECOGNITION OF ACHIEVEMENTS

These are the certificates of the different offices that I've had from the 12th Naval District. I was either Vice Commander, Commander or Training Officer for several years— until Al and Wanda got in. The first year that Al was in I followed him as Training Officer. I was commended for this several different times. This is now Flotilla 73—and that was then Flotilla 66—and I haven't held any offices since it's been the new set up (flotilla numbers had been changed). This award as a basic qualified regular member and instructor—I've had instructor all the way through. I'm not now—I haven't been qualified for it.

You were still teaching with the group?

I teach knots, but I don't get credit for it, but I still teach knots out at the high school. This year I was working and couldn't do it.

I know one year there were only three of us, and I had nine inspections, and Wells Watkins had three (another clipping of boat inspections). Now here's a copy of our original

bylaws, whether that would be anything that they would want. The committee— Commander Vernon Prigmore, Vice-Commander Al Graves, James Buchanan, Training Officer, Oscar Phillips and Athalie Ganter. If they can get any information out of that, they can have that.

I can make you a copy.

All right, I'd like to have that one back. Here's our first roster. I imagine that was 1961—Larry and Shirley Angelo, Senator Alan Bible, Bill Clark, Alan Crosby, Murray Dolan, Charles and Lois Fite, Ralph Jones, E.B. and Muriel Kirchen, husband and wife, Emmett and Doris Lewis, Bruce Nelson, Harry O'Brien, Bert Oppio, Vernon Prigmore, Margaret Rasset, Larry and Evelyn Scott, Audie and Alice Small, Lou Spitz, Wally Tun, owner of the motel right there just up 4th on Virginia Street and Wells Watkins.

Did you say that Alan Bible came out to Pyramid Lake when you were there?

Oh yes, he was out every time he was in town.

Now here are some of the original Whistling Buoy's (the Coast Guard Auxiliary magazine), and this was #1 of the Navigator (a national publication of the Coast Guard Auxiliary).

Now I know how the Auxiliary got started]

Yes, that was when we only had four members or five all together, and we just traded offices 'til we could get more people interested, but we just wouldn't give up.

Now I can see why you had the name "Sailor" at Harolds Club.

Yes, well I spent about 14 1/2 years in the navy and I tried to stay in after the Korean War because I had 16 years and two months, and if I could have stayed practically three years more I could have gotten retirement. As it is, I get nothing; it is just wasted time—just the same way as working at Harolds Club—I got nothing either (laughs).

How long would you have had to work at Harolds Club?

Oh no—no pension at Harolds Club. I tried to fight for it; that's the reason I didn't go down with Jessie Beck when she moved down to the Riverside. We had a deal going through that we were trying to get the dealers organized at Harolds Club, and if they had come under the Teamsters Union, I would have had 18 months to work, and then I would have gotten about ninety dollars a month retirement. I had about thirty-two years service. You see, there was no retirement to it at all—nothing.

You were about the oldest employee there?

Yes, I was the oldest, and the oldest in length of time at Harolds Club when I retired in '72. But I tried, and that's the reason that I didn't go down with Jessie. I tried to get them organized so that we would get that pension; but there's no pension, I don't think, at any of the clubs. Now I think that the Nugget in Sparks has what they call their own, and then Jessie Beck was going to put one in, but I don't know whether she ever got it in or not. But none of the dealers are under a pension plan. If you want your own pension, you can make your own pension plan.

BOATING SAFETY HAZARDS

What did you think was the biggest safety hazard in the boaters coming out with new boats?

Well, I think that they not knowing what they're doing. You know, it takes only a teaspoon of gasoline down in the hull, and if it happens to strike off—one teaspoon is the same as two strikes of dynamite, and so you can see how powerful it is. Fire is their biggest danger for the new boaters. And then carelessness in handling the boat in the water near swimmers and near water skiers and things of that nature. They don't understand that they are responsible, and they should know something about handling their boat. They should know something about the safety of their own passengers aboard and be sure that they have life preservers on board for every member, and any member that is up in age or under age—like children—should always wear a life preserver in any kind of weather because somebody can get thrown overboard, and a prop can cut the devil out of anybody.

Another thing—I don't like those belts for skiers (they're outlawed now), but a girl was skiing at Tahoe, and her father was in the boat. The daughter had one of those belts on. She fell and hit her head on one of those skis or something and must have knocked herself out. You know they just hold up your middle, and both her head and feet were down. By the time her father got to her she had drowned.

Almost the same thing happened to me when I was in the water skiing at Pyramid Lake. My son Ricky was in the boat, and I told him not to cut in too close to shore. When he did, I hit the rocks or something. I don't know how long I laid there—must have been unconscious, I guess, but mama could see me from where she was. But I had one of those vests that hold your head up—a Coast Guard approved one. I don't know how long it took Rick to get back. He was more interested in looking for the ski than me, I guess (laughs).

But there's a lot of boating that's not just right on the surface. People just don't realize that it's a dangerous weapon out there on the

water if you don't know what you're doing. If you don't take the caution to be sensible—not to take advantage of the other person and give the right-of-way, know the right-of-way and know how to take care of yourself on the water and know the different signs if your motor conks out; know how to signal another boat that you're in trouble and things like that. That's why I've always recommended that they should go to classes of some kind and learn to handle themselves and do the job—because that's what it is.

Now each lake area has different warning systems that you have to watch for.

Yes—Lake Tahoe, you watch for the center of the lake, and if you see a little dark streak running down the center of the lake—from the shore it looks like a ripple—and what it is, is the wind is circling that center part of the lake and raising these little ripples of water, and you've got about fifteen minutes to get off the lake before the storm hits. Pyramid Lake, if you'll watch the Pinnacles to the north end of the lake, and if the dust starts rolling up there, get close to the shore. The water at Pyramid is heavy with minerals, and it takes longer to come up, but it will settle down quicker. The water up at Lake Tahoe is fairly free of minerals and consequently it comes up faster, but it takes longer to settle down after the storm has hit.

What a lot of people don't realize—you take a fifteen or eighteen foot boat and go from here to Honolulu, and you can go through a storm because the waves are maybe four or five or maybe six hundred feet apart. But you take the waves out on these small lakes that we have here—the waves will be four and five feet apart—so you come up over the crest of one wave and when you start down, the other one will slap you on the

bow. That is why it is more dangerous boating on these small lakes than it is boating in the ocean.

Weren't there little dust devil-like whirlwinds out at Pyramid, too?

Yes, at the north end of the lake or over on the Pinnacle side. Sometimes it will start over where the Pyramid is. Sometimes it will start in the south end of the lake. But you have to watch the shoreline and then watch the clouds, and when those cumulus clouds start to roll in, you have to get close to shore and give yourself protection.

It is twelve miles across the lake at the widest part of Pyramid, and it's about twelve and a half miles across the widest part of Tahoe. Pyramid is twenty-six miles long; Tahoe is about twenty-six miles long, but Pyramid hasn't as much shoreline as Tahoe because there are not as many bays as there are in Tahoe. Both have about, I think they say, about one hundred seventy-six miles around the shoreline of Tahoe and about one hundred fifty at Pyramid Lake, so you can see there's a lot of ground to cover.

When you first see the whitecaps, isn't that another signal?

Get in close to shore, get in and slow down your boat and quarter it. In other words, what I mean by quartering it— don't go straight into it, but kind of quarter it (gestures at an angle) so that you're going across this way, and if that throws you off, cut over the other way. It's like tacking with a sailboat. You can't hit those waves straight ahead; you've got to hit sideways so that you go over this way, and they won't slap you down on the bow because those short waves that short chop are dangerous—awfully dangerous.

What would you say was your most important rescue?

I think it was when the hydro exploded at Lake Tahoe. I helped to assist in the rescue of the driver of the Purple Dragon (Miss Spokane was purple) when she sank at Pyramid Lake, and then when we were having the time trials of Tahoe Miss and Miss Budweiser. Tahoe Miss blew a supercharger, and from a boat patrol, one of the lady Auxiliarists, got in first. Oh what are the names, they're going to Honolulu—they bought a big boat. Gosh, I can't think of their name right now (Barbara McCartney). She came in and picked him (Slovak) right off of the part and I kept coming in, the other boat would come in and throw its wake—its rooster tail—on the other boat to extinguish its flames, but the one at Lake Tahoe—it didn't go to the bottom. It was the divers that caused that. They were riding up on the bow of it instead of getting off the boat and getting onto the patrol boats that we had standing by. We had five patrol boats standing by, but they said "Oh, we'll ride on the bow," and the bow went under the water, and down they went—she went to the bottom. It took four days, I think, to get it up. Didn't hurt it any (laughs), but that water at Pyramid isn't too good for any boat. If a motor goes down at Lake Tahoe it could be down there for a year and come back up, and you can pump it out, fill it with gas and the motor will run, but it won't at Pyramid—because of the minerals in the water—the minerals eat that aluminum right up.

But I never was unfortunate enough to be at a place where someone was seriously in trouble except during the running of the Regattas and the big boats, but I never had a chance to help with the assists—oh, I'd help with the assists on three or four rescues on Pyramid Lake and when one boat caught on

fire, but I was never on any real heroic rescue of any kind. Just never was at the right place at the right time—others were there. But I don't like to see that happen—I don't think it was necessary at all.

I still think that I did a good job of keeping the Auxiliary going while it was a very short membership, and now it is a full-fledged, going organization with good members. I think it is to the credit of Harry O'Brien, Wells Watkins, and Jim Buchanan and some of those that were in on it from the start to just keep bulldogging through. I don't remember who was the first Commander. I know that I was the Training Officer, I guess the second year. My memory is—I'm getting up here nearly seventy years old (laughs)—I forget lots of this stuff. I hadn't thought about it in months until you came in and wanted to get some information on this stuff so you kind of took me by surprise (laughs).

You've been the most permanent since I've known you.

Well, I tried to help out any way that I can. We're handicapped now on account of we just have social security. It costs quite a bit to run back and forth and to go to things.

Sometimes people would be stranded across the lake, maybe over night because of a shear pin.

Yes, I've helped on that two or three different times. I've crossed the lake and helped somebody fix a shear pin or take them gas—gas mostly—running out of gas—they get to water skiing, and they forget what they're doing, and they don't carry that extra gas can with them. A lot of them don't realize that they need any parts. Lots of them will go out with a boat, they won't have a wrench, they don't have a droge or anything. A droge

is a handy piece of equipment to carry on a boat for the simple reason—especially at Pyramid—if your motor happens to conk out, and you’re being driven against the rocks, you drop a droge over. A droge can be anything—it can be an empty gas can, a bucket, it can be a suitcase or take your tackle box and empty it and throw it over—anything that will float. That will keep your bow into the wind. Especially at Pyramid you should carry that anchor because if the wind starts pushing you in on the rocks you can drop your anchor and hold yourself off the rocks until help can come and get you. Or you can ease yourself back with the anchor out, and you can get into the water and ease yourself around the rocks and get onto the beach without wrecking your boat. But if you don’t have an anchor—no way of holding off at all—oars won’t do it because it’s too strong for that. Most of these modern boats don’t have a place for an oarlock anyway; all they use is a paddle. A paddle really has no use except to push you away from the dock or push you up to the dock. Persons should carry shear pins; they should carry flares or a flare gun so that if they do get stranded, they can send out the signal. Of course, now most of them have CB’s aboard, and they can radio in. But if you’re not equipped with a CB, you can turn your flag upside down—that is one signal for it— or you can stand up on the bow of the boat and wave—anything so that people will see you. You let people know that you’re in trouble and need assistance.

Do people know that they can start a bonfire if they are stranded at night?

Oh yes, they should know that, but a lot of them don’t. I don’t think a lot of them know anything about what they’re supposed to do. It’s amazing to me how simpleton they seem

to be when you ask them a question—well, I didn’t know that was supposed to be, and I didn’t know that this was supposed to be. That’s why I think they should have a boating license—a boat driver’s license—and go to class and qualify. They will go out here with a boat and maybe they’ve got four or five kids...

But I think the part of the whole thing that made me want to stay in the auxiliary was when we had the Regatta up at Pyramid, or I mean at Lake Tahoe. It was under Bill Harrah, and he furnished everything for us. I’d take my vacation from Harolds Club every year when they had the Regatta. We had it four or five years up there and we had it one year when they spent two weeks trying to break the water speed limit for hydros, and we were almost two weeks up there then and patrolling it. That was when Miss Budweiser and Tahoe Miss were running. We had a ball; we just really enjoyed ourselves up there—it was beautiful.

When you were taking your vacation time to patrol at Lake Tahoe, what was the cost?

Hmm, the only cost to us was the transportation up and back and that included my family. Bill Harrah set a motel up, the whole motel, for the time that the Regatta was on, and we each had our own private quarters. He furnished us cigarettes; he furnished us free drinks; he furnished us free meals—everything was furnished—and the only expense there was to the patrol. Now the officers from the Coast Guard, the 12th District, they came up on a per diem, and we could get a per diem for our gas transportation, but our gas for the boats and for the transportation was on Bill Harrah. Bill Harrah picked the bill up, and the same way with the meals including five different dinner shows up there. Once we went to see Liberace,

another time we went with Sammy Davis, Jr., and another time we went with the heavy set colored girl, what's her name?

Pearl Bailey?

She was there—we just had a ball.

Of course, we worked hard—we were out on the lake about seven o'clock in the morning and usually it was around five or six—unless the wind would come up—before we got into the motel. He even furnished us newspapers, and he would furnish us cigarettes. We could take our pick of the cigarettes. They would bring them right down to the hotel for us. We even had our own chef. When they were trying to break the speed record between Miss Budweiser and Tahoe Miss, the driver of Tahoe Miss was a refugee from Hungary or one of those places over there. He flew for American Airlines—one of the big airlines. The last night that we were there, he cooked up duck dinners. It was just out of this world. No, it was beautiful—those Regattas. I hated to see him drop out of it.

What motives do you think Bill Harrah had in sponsoring this?

He wanted—he had his own boats, you know, Tahoe Miss, and he had bought Miss Reno—that was the first one—that was the one that they raced out at Pyramid Lake, and he bought that from the City of Reno, and then they built two Tahoe Misses Out at their own shops—out on Gentry—or in Sparks there. The original, I think, Tahoe Miss is out there on display along with the cars and boats and the planes that he's got. But it got too expensive, and they wouldn't let him—the way I understood it—there was too much wrangling between it and where the Gold Cup would be held. We held the Gold

Cup at Pyramid Lake one year, and then we held the Gold Cup at Lake Tahoe, I think, two years. Seattle wanted it. Detroit wanted it on the Detroit River. It was a big deal—whoever would pay the most to bring the boats in would be the one to get it. Bill Harrah said it was too much of a hassle between the different owners and the different owners of the marinas that wanted it, so that's why they cancelled that.

[I've heard one of the motives for Bill Harrah's sponsoring the Regattas was to help promote Lake Tahoe]. It was partly, yes, but I don't think that was the sole reason. Bill loves fast cars and fast boats. No, I think it was personal. He could write it off on his income, the cost of his running the boat. It cost about—from what they told me, now this is, of course, what they told me—the boats cost around one hundred thousand to two hundred thousand, and one motor alone is five thousand. Now I imagine they are a lot higher. Just a prop on the Tahoe Miss was around sixteen hundred dollars, and they lost several props. They lost three out at Pyramid Lake that I know, and it cost around ten thousand dollars just to bring the Purple Dragon back up from the bottom when she sank at Pyramid Lake.

One of the amazing things about racing—the part that the Coast Guard Auxiliary takes in it in the patrol—is that there is a job for everybody to do. And if each one does it, it makes it a beautiful operation for everybody.

Now you take the Hawaii Kai, she won her—and made her complete last lap with her right sponson completely gone. The sponsons are those little wings that set out under the boat that balances the boat. That inside sponson was entirely gone, and she was making inside turns to the left. Nobody knows how she made the finish, but she made it, and she won the race. So it's interesting. But I really

think Bill sponsored it just for the love of the sport, but it got to be too much of a hassle with the big boat owners. I think he dropped it for that reason and then they wouldn't let him write off as much as he was writing off the first three or four years that they were in, and so it just got too expensive—that's all.

RELATIONSHIP WITH 12TH DISTRICT

What about the Coast Guard Auxiliary out of San Francisco—how did they handle the different units?

Well, each unit, now like you take our “73” here in Reno. We pay all our own expenses with the exception that when we go out on a patrol or hold a class, none of the people get paid for their time, but they will get paid for—like if they go up there to Tahoe and they are on orders—then they are on per diem. The same way with the officers down on the Coast Guard—if they come up here for a special reason or come up here—like the officers’ banquet or installation banquets. But the local Auxiliary picks up the tab for the meal and all of that. It is all done in our promotion and what we can pick up from our dues.

Like the classes that our Coast Guard Auxiliary holds—the only expense is for the people that go to the class is for the books that they study with. Other than that there is no cost. None of the instructors are paid—none of the instructors are reimbursed—not even for their gasoline going to and fro from

their classes. So it’s all voluntary, and it takes somebody that loves the business—loves the boating—and feels the need for it to belong to the Auxiliary for that reason. Let’s say that the commander or the captain of the division, if he goes down to San Francisco for the District Board meeting or the Admiral’s banquet or something down there, they are on orders when they are paid per diem, but their per diem is very low— it won’t cover their full expense.

Now I don’t know so much, because I haven’t been in contact too much with the dealers lately, but I know when it first started the dealer would sell you a boat, and if he wouldn’t tell you you’d have to have a life preserver and you’d have to have a paddle and all this extra equipment, and we saw the need that somebody should teach this, and so the Coast Guard Auxiliary was a teaching group. There’s another teaching group, and that’s the Nation’s Boating organizations—there’s about three of them—and the Outboard Boating Association—and they’re always fighting and trying to get more safety on the water.

The Coast Guard Auxiliary is sanctioned by the Coast Guard. The only thing the Coast Guard furnishes us is the equipment that we use in teaching. Like if we need a camera or something, and if they have one available, we can have it up here to use, but as it is, it turned out most of us or someone has donated one for something. Now we have our own equipment; most of it has been donated to the Auxiliary.

COAST GUARD AUXILIARY CADET GROUP

You were rather partial to the group of young teenage boys, too, weren't you?

Well, yes, we formed the first Coast Guard Auxiliary Cadet group, and my son was a member of it, Al Graves' son was a member of it. We had a group of about twelve to fifteen girls and boys in the Cadet group, and it went along for a couple of years, but it seemed as though National didn't want to sanction it—they didn't want to O.K. it or something. They didn't want to go into that; they were afraid that it would eventually cost the Coast Guard too much money to sponsor it, so they let it drop. But I was hoping—sincerely hoping—that they would, and I'm sorry that they didn't follow through because I think that it's something that should be done. The teenager, the young kids today, are the people of tomorrow, and they're the ones that are going to take over when we throw in the flag. And you take someone like myself that's nearly seventy years, I can't go out and do this boating like I used to do, and my son, just as soon as he gets himself established, he'll be

right in the Auxiliary, and he'll be doing the same thing that I was because he loves to be on the water, and he got his training, of course, through me. We had a lot of good cadets—about fifteen at one time. I don't remember too many of the names of the cadets, but they were from all walks of life. We had one judge's daughter and son. We had a lot of good groups that worked with us.

RECEIPT OF CHARTER FOR FLOTILLA 66

What would you say was your best award or achievement?

I think that the nicest thing that happened to me was when I received (and I had been only the Training Officer) the charter for the Auxiliary (laughs) although I was scared to death. Harry O'Brien was Commander, and Wells Watkins was vice-Commander, and I was Training Officer, and at the last minute they called me. I took off from the days work, and went down to set things up in the Sky Room at the Mapes. We had the installation banquet in the Sky Room. At the last minute Harry O'Brien called up and said he couldn't come—he was sick. Wells Watkins called and said he was sick and he couldn't come—and so that left me as the only one to accept it. That was my greatest thrill—receiving the charter for Flotilla 66.

MOTIVATION OF AUXILIARY MEMBERS

Would you know what motivated some of the others— Harry O'Brien, Lou Spitz, etc.?

Lou Spitz didn't stay in very long. That job out at the Motor Vehicle Department—he was tied up too much, I think. Harry O'Brien—I think his motive was that he did boating, had a good boat, and he was a man that liked to belong to organizations and to participate in local things. Of course, he started that St. Patrick's Day parade in Reno. Wells Watkins' motive was mostly that he wanted to be out on the water, and he got interested in it, worked hard for it, and then he had family problems and dropped out. He was a good member—he worked hard for us. Jim Buchanan—the original man that started the whole thing—his was purely the idea that he wanted it. It was something that needed to be done, and he had attended two or three meetings down in San Francisco—down in the Bay Area—down there—Belle Isle and different places, and he knew what they could do and just how the job should be done. So when he came up here to Reno on a contract job—and he was only

here about a year and a half or two years—but while he was here, he was really a worker. He got out and went amongst the people and got them to come and join, and I think that he was the one that got Alan Bible in, and I think he was the one that got Harry O'Brien and Lou Spitz and all of those interested in it, so he was really the backbone of it as long as he was here in Reno.

Then at the beginning, we fought for about two or three years, I guess, to keep it together until we got such people in as Helen and Orton Steele and Al Graves and Wanda Graves and the different ones, and they worked real hard. We've had a lot of good, hard-working members, and a lot of them—when they moved away from Reno—we'd lose a good group. We've had two or three or four good family groups that moved out of the area that went into other things. One I know of went up to Oregon, and he belongs to that Flotilla in Portland, and then another went down to Visalia—I don't know the number of it. And then we had two or three that moved out, and one or two went over to Carson City

and started that group and still are in that group over there.

We even had a judge from Carson City—Judge Gregory—he was our member for awhile because the one up at Lake Tahoe is a seasonal group, whereas here in Reno we were a twelve-month group. We were operating all year around, and the ones up at Lake Tahoe that Gregory belonged to were only open, say from April or May—May, June, July and August, and then the group disbanded for the winter and that was their boating season up there. But here—I understand that Judge Gregory still belongs to the Flotilla at Lake Tahoe or the one at Carson City—I'm not sure which—whether he's still active or not.

Now then, there were the get-togethers. We used to have a lot of picnics and parties out at the lake and barbeques, and we'd have days when we'd have boat-ins. Everyone would come out with their boat and their family, and everyone would bring their own picnic Lunch, and we'd just make a day of it. We'd do the patrols and put out buoys while we were out there. It was actually, I'd guess in my instance, just a love of being on the water and being out amongst a good bunch of people, and then you'd come back into town—why you'd just feel—well, gee! That was a good day and a job well done.

You did tell me about your proudest moment in getting your award.

One of the biggest thrills of my lifetime was when I got the ten-year pin and the permanent membership in the Reno Flotilla. The pin and membership was presented by my son, Cadet Richard Prigmore, and I was congratulated by the incoming Commander, Art Sowle, and the past Commander, Fred Selstrom was the Presentation Officer that night—but that was one of them. I think

the personal gratification that you get when you went out there to the lake on patrol, and you got the enjoyment in your own personal satisfaction of knowing you've done a good job, and I think that was a personal thing.

You have had pretty serious surgery since you retired?

Yes, I had what they call an aneurysm. I have all plastic tubing from my heart to all the lower part of my body—to my stomach. It all started with appendicitis, and it broke. I think it broke at twelve o'clock at night, and I didn't get to the hospital until nearly five the next afternoon. When I did, it was serious, and they had to take out nearly everything inside, so I guess I could call myself the plastic man (laughs).

What do you think would be your philosophy of life— you've done so many things?

I think my grandfather's code was what I like to think of as life, and that is "do unto others as you would have others do unto you." I think if you live up to that, there isn't much else you can say. I have always tried to be that way. I don't like to go to the fore or push myself forward or anything, and I won't ask somebody to do something that I wouldn't do myself. That's what makes it kind of hard for me right now because there are a lot of things that I can't do any more since I'm crippled up, but I still manage to get along and to live up to that idea.

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